



SHARP News



Drug-resistant Sexually Transmitted Pathogens

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Ciprofloxacin-resistant gonorrhea, which is widespread in parts of Asia, may now be endemic in **Hawaii**, where one-third of all gonorrhea cases are military members or beneficiaries. There have also been 12 cases of **gonorrhea** in **Kansas City** with **reduced susceptibility to azithromycin**¹. Two cases of **ofloxacin and azithromycin-resistant *Chlamydia trachomatis*** were recently identified and associated with treatment failures². Growing evidence has linked HIV-1 drug-resistance to treatment failure and the slowing decline of deaths due to AIDS³.

According to the WHO, in poorer countries, where people may be unable to afford the full course of treatment, or are only able to afford to buy counterfeit drugs on the black market, the under-use of drugs encourages the development of resistant strains. The most susceptible microbes in these people may be killed by insufficient doses while the more resistant microbes are may survive and multiply. In wealthy countries, resistance is emerging for the opposite reason – the overuse of drugs. Unnecessary demands for drugs by patients and overuse of antimicrobials in food production both contribute to increased drug resistance. Currently, 50% of all antibiotic production is used to treat sick animals, promote livestock and poultry growth, or rid cultivated foods of destructive organisms. Regardless of where drug resistance originates, globalization, increased travel and trade ensure that these strains quickly travel elsewhere. "The world may only have a decade or two to make optimal use of many of the medicines presently available to stop infectious diseases," said Dr Heymann, Executive Director of WHO's programme on Communicable Diseases. "We are literally in a race against time to bring levels of infectious disease down worldwide, before the diseases wear the drugs down first." ⁴

And if increased drug resistance was not enough, the U.S. also faces an enormous level of sexually transmitted disease transmission (15.3 million new cases in 1996)⁵. Drug resistance aside, a significant proportion of some infections are asymptomatic until they become very serious (i.e. gonococcus and chlamydia in females) and some infections are simply incurable (i.e. genital herpes, HPV, HBV, HIV). Complicating the matter is secrecy, shame, and social stigma, which inhibit open discussion of the problem.

Clearly, our best hope for gaining control of this national and global problem is to prevent transmission. We can begin by providing our Sailors, Marines, and DoN families with the information they need to make wise decisions regarding their sexual behavior and health.

1. STD Advisor, (Vol 3 No 4, April 2000, pg 39-40),
2. The Journal of Infectious Diseases (2000;181:1421-7, 13 April 2000
3. CDC; HIV-AIDS Surveillance Report Vol 11, No 1, June 1999, pg 3
4. WHO Press Release WHO/41,12 June 2000, Drug Resistance Threatens to Reverse Medical Progress
5. American Social Health Association, STDs in America, Dec 1998, pg 4